

CITY HALL TASK FORCE MEETING SUMMARY

The City Hall Task Force met at 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, July 16, 2019 in Conference Room No. 1 at the Willmar City Office Building.

Members present were: Council Members Kathy Schwantes, Julie Asmus, Fernando Alvarado, Shawn Mueske and Mayor Marv Calvin.

Also present were: City Administrator Brian Gramentz, Planning and Development Services Director David Ramstad, City Planner Sarah Swedburg, Rudy Vigil WRAC 8, Shelby Lindrud "West Central Tribune" and Administrative Assistant Janell Sommers. Members of the public who attended were Dirk Mueleners.

Chair Schwantes recapped the events of the City Hall Task Force which brought it to where it is today. She noted that at the January Council Retreat the priorities for the new City Hall were identified and the current Task Force was established. The original priorities were refined and based on six different downtown sites the Fire Station rose to the top as the first location. A public meeting was held and based on the concerns of safety and access, this location was removed from consideration. Looking again at the priorities for locations, the focus was shifted to Block 25 and the current City Hall (either renovating or demolishing and rebuilding). The Council held a closed session to discuss Block 25 based on the outcome, no direction was given to staff in regard to purchasing this site.

The meeting was opened up for comments on the current City Hall site. One comment was that a remodel would be cost prohibitive. The vision of demolition of the building and turning it into green space and parking was expressed. Mayor Calvin brought forth an email he received expressing concern for parking at the current site. He stated he felt the Council has done a valiant effort to try and stay downtown by exploring all options and we need to expand our horizon and look at other options. Council Member Alvarado brought up an email received about moving to the library and the library to the mall. He questioned if the Task Force should look at the global picture of the community, where there is growth and how to best satisfy the balance between downtown and new growth to refocus the Task Force's ideas. Chair Schwantes expressed her concern of relocating staff feeling it would be highly inefficient, cumbersome for the public and would add a negative element to the build process.

The Task Force discussed the parameters remaining the same and removing the downtown piece. Chair Schwantes asked if there were any members who felt strongly on the current site for the future City Hall site. Council Member Mueske echoed the concern that staff remain at the current site as long as possible which would mean exploring a heating system that can be used in the Auditorium once the building is vacated. Chair Schwantes shared the list of priorities the Task Force initially used as follows: acquisition cost, internal efficiencies, ample and convenient parking, impact to the City tax rolls, demolition costs, being accessible and traffic flow, cost of employee displacement and the inconvenience of that to the community, a T-1 line (which is no longer as critical due fiber optic), high visibility and the last one being connected to the Auditorium which was not placed as a high priority by the group.

Council Members Alvarado and Mueske stated they felt if City Hall is moved out of the downtown, the Council needs to make a commitment to the Auditorium. City Planner Swedburg informed the Task Force that staff is currently exploring avenues to create construction documents to apply for some legacy grants for the Auditorium.

Chair Schwantes asked City Administrator Gramentz for next steps in looking at other sites within the City and perhaps staff can assist in locating other sites to bring to the Task Force to evaluate. City Administrator Gramentz explained that the Task Force's core values can be applied to any site. Planning and Development Director Ramstad brought up the Community Center and City Hall combined. Is the current Community Center site a viable option? Council Member Mueske spoke of a combined facility concept and the downtown site restrictions for the footprint. Council Member Alvarado spoke in favor of the combined facility as it would have an increased use of the facility and give the community access to services. Council Member Asmus felt there would be a cost savings of a combined facility and the current community center site being a gateway to the community and the ample parking, a good work environment for employees and the visibility aspect for the community center. The Task Force reviewed the site visually and discussed the pros and cons. Council Member Alvarado opined he liked this site and the importance of giving the public time for input. Chair Schwantes stated she felt staff needed direction from this group.

Chair Schwantes recapped the Task Force meeting as: explore the current community center location for a joint city hall/community center, direct staff to reach out to contractors to seek their interest on a pro bono basis in presenting a conceptual site design/analysis of a combined facility at the current community center site, staff also explore the price for an overpass across Highway 71 by contacting communities who have recently constructed one. The Task Force will also continue exploring the current community center location as the primary location not necessarily as the sole option but moving forward by evaluating it. Council Member Alvarado added that if someone comes up with a creative idea about this or some partnership in another location the Task Force remain open to it. It was asked that any ideas or concepts that come forward be sent to the City Administrator for compilation.

The meeting adjourned at 5:50 p.m.

Janell Sommers
Administrative Assistant